b. Legal Power

692 The contemporary /legal/ organization is, except for a few details, the same in the three territories inhabited by the Pahouin. In the Cameroons and Gabon, criminal law /la justice repressive/ is in the hands of magistrates administering the French penal code; civil law is administered by first- and second-degree courts presided over by an official of administrative rank, sitting with two African assessors. There are also the so-called customary courts composed entirely of Africans and not entitled to deal with questions of personal status /état des personnes/, and a mediation system preliminary to all court action, in the jurisdiction either of chiefs or of first-degree court assessors. The system in Spanish territory is similar, but the first jurisdiction of the penal law is entrusted to officers called jefes de demarcación.

Alongside this official framework may often be noted a semi-official mechanism, sometimes tolerated, sometimes prosecuted as illegal. This consists of courts or arbitrators of the ngôl, of the bwiti or of the meyoñ, and also disciplinary committees of the missions, official or semi-official.

671 The distinction between civil and criminal was undoubtedly less sharp in former times. It did, however, exist, and an organization like the ngil dealt primarily with criminal cases, the major crime from which all others arose being that of ngbwel, sorcery. A homicide /meurtre/ might be a civil matter, when the circumstances precluded the probability of an act of sorcery; a well-planned theft, on the other hand, or even outstanding commercial acumen, could involve a capital charge.

627 Outside the ngil, law was administered in the first instance by the esa or ntol mot of the extended family or the village. This was a matter of disciplinary rather than legal power, at least so long as the ntôl's decisions concerned only his bobenyañ. When the case (étom) 698 went beyond a purely family framework, recourse was had to a judge, ntyi'i mejô, palaver-cutter, chosen within the clan from a kinship level nearer the ancestor. If several allied clans were involved, arbitrators or assessors were taken from among the mintôl not directly concerned in the suit. Finally, a diviner or magician, mvimvi'i or [791] ngengeñ, could be consulted, either visited in his own dwelling or into consultation.

[575] Suits between members of an association were, and often still are, conducted by an official of the association /71/.

8: Bennett D-5 (ca. 1898) 1899 FH9 Fang FH9

bread-winners and some are strong and muscular, while many more are weak and worn out from ceaseless toil.

The Fang make good carriers, and will do a splendid day's journey even in the wet season with bad forest trails, if not overloaded. A carrier's load should never exceed 25 kilogrammes; and 20 would pay better on a long journey. The first day out with a caravan the men usually drag along slowly, until their loads settle well down in the *kingi* and fit their backs. The *kingi* is a very ingenious contrivance for carrying a load in; it is usually made from a forest vine with a plaited head strap. To hurry carriers the first day is a bad mistake; poorly adjusted loads chafe and cause sore backs, and before night the whole caravan is tired out and sulky. It is a wise traveller in Africa as elsewhere who knows how to save his men.

A very noticeable fact among the Fang is the scarcity of old men. I attribute this largely to the ravages of syphilis; the same terrible disease that has done so much towards the degeneration of numerous coast tribes, and which is already playing fearful havoc among the Fang. Indolent, untrustworthy and warlike, they are nevertheless a most companionable people. The slightest piece of drollery or a joke immediately causes laughter. It has been my privilege to visit many foreign lands including China, Japan and Korea, yet never in my life have I met such an absolutely good-natured, fun-loving people as the Fang.

The men are not fond of work. They frequently ask me for something to do to "earn a cloth." If I tell them to cut fence poles or good clean bark in the forest, they decline. A male Fang's idea of work is to sit in the *Abeng* (= palaver house) and make fish lines by rolling pineapple fibre along the upper portion of his thigh, or to manufacture *Abi* (roof thatch). At these occupations he can converse with all comers, hear the news and take his part in talking a palaver. They are a revengeful people and will keep up a palaver over a woman for many years. If they do not succeed in shooting a man during a palaver they do not hesitate to fire at and kill a woman, while captives held as hostages are often treated with great cruelty.

The women regard virtue very lightly. Before marriage a girl can do nearly as she pleases. It is absolutely safe to state that it would be almost impossible to find a maiden in a Fang village over sixteen years of age. Adultery is common, and one of the chief causes of "women palavers." Women rank first in value as goods for trade, next in value are goats, then guns and cloth. The greed for goods has a strong hold on the people. They learn quickly but have very little originality. They have no obscene rites. Their habits are very dirty; they will wash in a small pool of water and, while bathing, fill the gourds or imported jugs with the water in which they are washing and use it for domestic purposes. In many other ways they are absolutely filthy, and descend to the level of brute creation. They are not over-burdened with modesty, both sexes frequently bathe together in a perfectly nude condition. A male Fang passes a large percentage of his time in